The Sustainability Challenge: implications for chief executives in the third sector

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In terms of future opportunity, it is clear that society as a whole must move to tackle climate change, and the third sector should lead the way. Our concerns about the economy should not be used as an excuse to step backwards. We must harness the potential of green job creation, and see our response to climate change as a way to create a thriving and sustainable economy.

Before we do this we must put our own house in order and lead by example. I would be the first to admit my own organisation does not have an unblemished copy book, but we are addressing this. We now have a staff team working on our environmental performance.

We also have the wonderful examples of third sector activity represented by the members of the Sustainability Special Interest Group to inspire and inform us. My thanks to them in helping us develop this publication.

I hope that as you read this, you feel inspired to take action and to seize this agenda and I hope we can support you in doing so.

Stephen Bubb
CEO, ACEVO
Time for change

Why read this paper?

Sustainability is an issue for us all. It is not only about maintaining our funding in a fragile economic climate, but also about delivering on our long-term responsibilities to those we work with and our supporters.

At the most basic level sustainability involves the integration of social, environmental and economic concerns to meet society’s needs now and in the future. It is not a matter of ‘being green’; it is about realising the best opportunities with the resources we have (App.1). There is certainly a crucial environmental dimension to sustainability. Creating safe and healthy places to live is central to any work on social development or regeneration.

Nationally and globally, a new and urgent focus on climate change has seen what were once just ‘environmental issues’, move to the centre of government policy. One of the first actions of Barack Obama on becoming President was to commit the USA to join the international process to tackle climate change. In the UK we have the Climate Change Act which sets national targets; local targets are sure to follow. The recent NHS consultation on its ‘Carbon Reduction Strategy’ saw 95% of the responding PCTs strongly supporting the NHS taking an active lead in this work and 65% calling for stronger measures. Tackling these problems is now a responsibility for all society and the third sector can play a vital role in making change happen.

ACEVO works to improve third sector organisation (TSO) performance through strengthening and supporting CEOs. We believe that delivering sustainability is fundamental to improved leadership and a healthy future for the sector. This needs to be treated as a core issue by all CEOs. This briefing is intended to support our members in understanding how and what they need to consider, the relevance to any organisation and how to ensure the organisation is still here in five years’ time.

What is the sustainability challenge?

Effective, efficient, high quality service delivery has these social, economic and environmental dimensions. Whatever the primary purpose of any TSO, sustainability is central to delivering the mission. The challenge is two-fold. Firstly there is the need to integrate work on these issues and to maintain the balance between social, economic and environmental impacts. The second part of the challenge is to manage the changes that will arise from linking this wider agenda with ongoing work.

Research work across the sector suggests that environmental aspects are often out of balance with the social and economic issues and are still seen as side issues. Yet it is usually the poor who suffer the extra problems posed by poor environments. These issues of ‘environmental justice’ range from hard-to-heat homes and lack of safe green spaces to air and soil pollution and access to healthy food. Every neighbourhood should offer wellbeing and a decent quality of life to the people who live there, and this should not be at the expense of those living elsewhere.

The social and economic dimensions also pose new challenges. Sustainability is about trying to find fairer, more just ways of trading and working together which treat people and the environment with respect both locally and globally.
Why does this matter?

Aside from any moral imperative to change the way we work and live there are direct implications for organisations that fail to meet this challenge. Failure may mean that an organisation will not make the most of the available resources, and may be in danger of losing future funding and supporters.

- Funders are now expecting those they support to prove their sustainability credentials. The days of paying lip service to this are limited as the demands for proof become more rigorous.

- Those procuring services from TSOs are increasingly expected to deliver on sustainability targets and they are passing this on down their supply chain.

- Assessing your impact and improving performance can lead to huge savings. BTCV recently achieved a 40% saving in energy costs. This has released resources for core activities as well as improving their environmental impact.

The business case becomes stronger every year: “Environmental problems are, first and foremost, matters of social responsibility. While considerations of social responsibility are important, executives who frame environmental issues solely in those terms may overlook the business opportunities and risks that come with such problems. Treating environmental issues like other business issues can lead to more creative problem-solving as well as better bottom-line results.” (Forest L. Reinhardt, Harvard Business Review 2007)

Sustainability is not just about delivering your mission or better services. It is about creating better places to live and ultimately about the survival of our communities and our society.

What can we do about it?

This is a decision you need to take internally, developing a plan appropriate to your organisation. An effective business case needs to be made to support your decision-making, based on sound cost benefit analysis. Some savings can be made in the short term, while other changes will require a longer term view. This is about planning and managing change, and about assessing and choosing the best practical options.

The rest of this briefing provides further detail to support your decision-making, under the following key headings:

- Sustainability, leadership and the role of a chief executive
- Policy and governance
- Operations and service provision
- Finance: procurement, expenditure, funding and resourcing
- Advocacy and work with stakeholders
Nine good reasons to change

• **The financial reason:** Cutting energy and waste will cut carbon emissions and save money.

• **The governance reason:** This is part of living up to our values and delivering our mission.

• **The beneficiaries reason:** There is a duty to those we represent or work with – board, volunteers, beneficiaries - to use resources efficiently, to ensure we have the biggest impact within our means.

• **The legal reason:** There is a growing range of environmental legislation (see section 3.3) and many voluntary organisations will have responsibilities arising from these laws and regulations.

• **The ‘environmental justice’ reason:** The poorest people in Britain usually suffer from the worst environments; this worsens inequalities and can affect their health and economic prospects.

• **The climate change reason:** Society needs to tackle climate change otherwise severe weather; floods, food shortages etc. will in the long term undermine all the positive changes that we are working towards.

• **The ‘greener living’ reason:** Creating greener neighbourhoods and workplaces makes them nicer places to live and work; people will feel better and work better.

• **The leadership reason:** Making the changes and promoting what’s been done will help make an organisation look innovative and positive.

• **The expectation for reporting:** Private companies are under increasing pressure to report on their environmental impacts. It may soon become good practice for voluntary organisations to include an overview of their environmental progress in their annual report.
Sustainability, leadership and the role of a chief executive

Successful CEOs are already taking up the sustainability agenda, providing leadership and influencing and informing those they work with. The challenge is to manage linking these concerns in a way that delivers the core purposes for any organisation.

Taking on new issues poses a challenge for any CEO. Most voluntary organisations are busy to the point of being stretched and adding new issues to a full agenda may cause stress and concern among staff. It will be important to show commitment and leadership while also developing a plan and policy that can have the maximum impact with minimum disruption to core services.

The TSO leader needs to constantly strive to improve the organisation, considering the costs and benefits of changes. The imperative is that this analysis must consider environmental, social and economic aspects to ensure improved sustainability.

Your mission and the sustainability challenge

Every organisation has a mission. It may be alleviation of poverty, better housing or health care or simply helping people get a better quality of life. All these issues link to the sustainability agenda (see background information box 2 for more detail on this).

Many TSOs have missions that relate primarily to social and economic parts of this agenda. One key aspect of this challenge is therefore to integrate the environmental perspective and to do this in ways that bring benefit to the existing work.

There are good reasons to take such action. It is usually the poorest who suffer most from environmental degradation or who face the greatest impact of increased costs. The next few years will also see increasing pressures on every organisation to cut waste and improve environmental performance. The UK now has the Climate Change Act which sets national targets. Already many local councils are monitoring their climate impacts as part of the new National Performance Framework. This will affect TSOs that act as suppliers and partners to the public sector.

There are more immediate challenges. Cutting energy waste has been an environmental and economic issue for many years and as prices rise this is becoming an area where significant cash savings can be made. Waste management costs are also rising, making reuse and recycling a more urgent issue. Larger organisations with environmental management schemes will expect those from whom they procure services to work to similar standards.
The role of TSO leaders

Recent economic crisis and environmental concerns have heightened awareness of the relationship between environmental issues, economic models, social impacts and global issues meaning that this sector could be much more influential than it is.

Community leaders are regularly more trusted than politicians or business people (Ref. 1). This influence is important in at least two ways. Voluntary action can be important in helping people change their behaviour both individually and collectively; it can also lead to them being more engaged in calling for change from national and local government.

It is clear that many TSOs still feel that these issues are outside their primary concerns. However, pressure to change and improve leadership on sustainability is increasing from funders, supporters, beneficiaries and trustees.

Making change happen

Better Places, Better Planet, a recent Community Development Foundation publication (Ref. 2) suggests that voluntary organisations can work for change in many ways:

- **Members**: Any organisation can play a powerful role in supporting its members to get involved in these issues.

- **Local communities**: A group can promote positive action in the area where it works.

- **Other voluntary organisations**: Many meet and interact with others and can encourage them to take action and lead by example.

- **Other agencies**: Any organisation can work to ensure that larger agencies change what they do and can also influence their suppliers.

- **The organisation itself**: Any voluntary organisation can work to improve its own performance in terms of what it does and the goods and services it uses.

Background information box 1

**Linking social and environmental issues – a new opportunity**

Sustainable development emerged as a concept due to perceived tensions between the need for social and economic development and environmental protection. But while the environmental and economic links have been widely developed there are still uncertainties over the policy and practice linkages between the social and environmental agendas.

The Defra-funded Every Action Counts programme revealed uncertainties in a number of national voluntary organisations about how far their concerns about social justice were shared by environmental NGOs, and similar concerns within the environmental sector about a perceived ‘blinkered’ approach to the global environmental crisis in parts of the social sector.

That situation has changed in recent years but there is still room for more cooperation. The
growing interest in environmental issues has opened new potential niches for activity that may offer ways for groups with different objectives to find common ground in delivering change. A recent report by the Green Alliance on The Politics of Climate Change (Ref. 3) suggests that there are three important areas in the voluntary sector where links are being made and much more can be done.

Many organisations working with poorer and vulnerable communities see fuel poverty as a critical issue. More than three million households spend more than 10% of their household income on energy. This is usually because they have hard-to-heat homes; some are in social housing, where more action is still needed, but many are in the private rented sector. National Energy Action is the leading voluntary sector network working on these issues and they make strong and direct links between this immediate concern and longer-term work to ‘decarbonise’ our economy (see box on climate change).

Larger voluntary organisations such as housing associations are already facing up to new building regulations and other legislation, leading the UK towards ‘zero carbon homes’ and transport providers will also be expected to have ways to minimise emissions.

Organisations with an international perspective, whether they are focused on global development or issues such as refugee welfare, will certainly find links between environmental issues and their concerns. Work by Oxfam and others shows this very clearly (Ref. 4) and serious climate change impacts are already being seen in some of the countries of origin of many UK ethnic minority communities.

Taking a lead on the sustainability challenge

Much of this work is about leading and managing change – change in how the organisation delivers its mission as well as change in how the organisation is run. This needs planning and commitment. Change management is often the key to success for any CEO.

• Working within the organisation

Recent work shows 94% of British people think that protecting the environment is important to them personally (Ref. 1), so there are people within your organisation who are interested. Given the number of local environmental groups it is quite possible that some staff and trustees may be actively involved in their spare time.

Interested individuals play a vital role in driving environmental change in an organisation (Ref. 3). “Charities implement environmental initiatives often as a result of pressure from key individuals who are either working within, or are closely associated with, the charity, rather than the result of a strategic decision by trustees. There was also concern that if such key individuals left, then the momentum for environmental action would be lost.” Background information box 3 includes advice on staff engagement.

There may be staff keen to see change, but if change is going to last it needs to come from the management and trustees and it needs to be resourced. An important part of making this happen is being clear on what is involved. Development of an action plan and an understanding of the costs and implications will be important. This is covered in more detail in the next section.
The Every Action Counts programme, aimed at getting third sector bodies active on environmental issues, breaks work towards sustainability into five areas. This segmentation can be helpful as an aid-mémoire when developing a policy or action plan:

- Energy and climate change
- Transport
- Waste minimisation and recycling
- Sustainable procurement
- Care for where you live

The extent to which staff will welcome or resist change will depend on many factors. Good leadership will be important, including at the planning and policy stage, ensuring that the commitments are made and that the goals are challenging but realistic. Change will also need leadership in actually making changes to how services are delivered and offices are run: leadership by example in embracing new work practices. Above all leadership will be needed in getting everyone involved – staff, trustees and beneficiaries – to understand why change is needed and how they can play a part.

- Working outside the organisation

Leadership will also be important in external relations. Suppliers and contractors will need to engage with the change process. This will need planning and negotiation and perhaps the development of new partnerships.

There is also a wider agenda. A sustainability perspective may provide a new view on service delivery but it may also offer insights on why those services are needed, and how matters can be improved at a policy level. Environmental policy issues are often only discussed within that context – increased engagement by social development groups may lead to better policy and practice.

Background information box 2

The climate change challenge

While there are still professional ‘climate sceptics’, the debate about climate change has moved on. The overwhelming scientific consensus is that the world climate is indeed changing and that this process is likely to accelerate dangerously if the global community does not take rapid action. The argument is now about how best to do this.

Global average temperatures rose by 0.7°C during the 20th century. All but one of the warmest ten years on record has occurred since 1990 (UK government figures) and the signs are that it will get worse. The key reason for all this is that we are putting more gases into the atmosphere that absorb more of the sun’s heat. These gases include carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane. CO₂ is responsible for about two-thirds of all the warming resulting from human activity and CO₂ levels are rising rapidly because of the rate at which we are burning fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas). In the UK around:

- 65% of emissions come from energy production and use (excluding transport)
- 21% are from transport
- 7% are from agriculture
- 4% come from industrial processes
About 40% of CO2 emissions are the result of decisions taken directly by all of us as individuals – our ‘carbon footprints’. For more on this see information box 5 on cutting your organisations’ carbon footprint.

The UK now has the Climate Change Act which aims to achieve 80% cuts in emissions (on 1990 levels) by 2050 – this means about 77% of cuts on current levels. British and EU policy is based on limiting global temperature rises to 2°C, but there is substantial concern from many scientists that these radical-sounding 80% cuts may not be enough to do this. To meet these targets every organisation and community will need to play its part, even if that seems to be a small one.

The UK’s climate is projected to change significantly by 2100, with average annual temperatures rising by up to 5°C if no action is taken. The specific changes we are likely to see can be summarised as:

- Higher average temperatures
- More extreme high temperatures threatening the health of vulnerable people
- Wetter winters and increased flooding
- Drier summers, with water shortages in many areas and damage to wildlife and crops
- Rising sea levels, leading to more coastal erosion and a greater risk of flooding

All this is likely to have the worst impacts on the poorest communities (both here and across the world), especially those likely to be affected by flooding or in poor housing. In the worst possible cases temperatures rising worldwide would make parts of the world uninhabitable and lead to millions of deaths.

The good news is that there is still time to tackle these problems, and in ways that can also help local communities. Low energy homes will be cheaper to heat, better public transport will benefit those without cars, and national energy efficiency programmes will create new jobs.

But for lasting global change a new global deal is needed to replace the current ‘Kyoto Protocol’. A major UN conference will take place in Copenhagen in December 2009 to try and secure this new deal. This is likely to be a major focus for activity by NGOs and other voluntary groups in the year leading up to this.

This is an issue where the political and scientific pictures are changing rapidly. For anyone wanting to learn more about these issues, New Scientist magazine has an excellent guide which also tackles common climate change myths, see: http://environment.newscientist.com/channel/earth/climate-change.

For other information sources see page 21.
This section looks at delivering changes across all aspects of the organisation. The four key areas where work will be important are:

- Policy and governance
- Operations and service provision
- Finance: procurement, expenditure and funding
- Advocacy and work with stakeholders

This change will involve:

- Developing positive initiatives to help integrate sustainability into your overall work
- Reducing your environmental impact and cutting waste
- Getting staff, trustees and volunteers to see this as part of their everyday work

### 3.1 Policy and governance

An environment policy is now a necessity; more and more funders expect to see one. But if a policy is only produced to be added to funding applications then it is unlikely to be taken seriously. Any policy needs to link to targets for change, so an action and implementation plan will also be vital, supported by staff, and with their full ‘buy-in’.

This policy should link clearly to your overall aims as much as to your daily operations. A key first step may be to do an assessment of how the organisation’s current work supports sustainability and impacts on the environment.

The nature and feasibility of this task will of course depend on the size and operations of the organisation and someone will need to do it. This highlights the need for that staff buy-in. If this new area of policy and practice is to go forward, someone will need to take on the work. A staff working group may be one way to involve both the enthusiasts and the managers. Background information box 3 suggests ways forward.

**Engaging trustees**

Getting staff engaged will be essential to deliver operational change. It will be equally or more important to get this change built into your long-term strategy and for this the support of trustees will be needed. This needs to be approached in the same way as any other new development, probably with an initial discussion between chief executive and chair; and the development of a scoping paper.

It will be important to allow ample time in a trustee meeting to ensure that any concerns are properly discussed. Opportunities and threats should be assessed and the different perspectives that may come from individual trustees can help with this. New ideas can be considered and incorporated where useful.
It is likely that a key to success will be clarity on how this links to and supports the mission of the organisation, and that trustees can see some short-term benefits. Costed figures around energy use may be one way to demonstrate this.

The outcomes from discussions with trustees should be confidence on all sides that this is feasible, a commitment to change and a desire to move forward. If this can be communicated clearly to staff, then it will help set the stage for change.

Background information box 3

Developing sustainability policy and practice

This checklist identifies the actions that are likely to be needed. The Every Action Counts website has specific guidance on developing such a policy and a sample (Ref. 11)

A. Building organisational skills and support
   Key activities:
   • Hold an introductory session on these issues for all/relevant staff
   • Draft introductory paper
   • Discuss sustainability/environment issues with trustees
   • Encourage relevant staff to take up training opportunities to support new practices
   • Work with specialist help in introducing issues
   • Carry out an assessment of how work currently being done by the organisation supports sustainability and impacts on the environment
   • Exchange practice with other VCS bodies

B. Policy work
   Key activities:
   • Use introductory paper to develop a draft environmental policy for the organisation
   • Discuss draft policy with key staff and trustees
   • Review that environmental policy to consider how it impacts on all work areas and on other policies
   • Finalise the policy and consider linking this to existing social development work to produce a sustainability statement
   • Identify priority areas for change and action that will help deliver the points within the policy

C. Practice development
   Key activities:
   • Identify member of staff (and/or working group) with responsibility for sustainability issues
   • Carry out a base line survey (a ‘walk-through’ survey of the workplace may help)
   • Gather information about current procurement practice (e.g. energy bills, transport costs, paper supplies etc.)
   • Draft an action plan and refine this with relevant staff
   • Develop in-house environmental practice such as tackling energy waste and paper recycling
   • Explore switching electricity supply to a green energy supplier
   • Work with the Fairtrade Foundation to identify the steps towards developing fairtrade-friendly work practices
   • Introduce some form of environmental management system to save resources and money
D. Informational work
Key activities:

- Distribute the environmental policy and action plan throughout the organisation
- Let all staff know the key current environmental figures (e.g. energy use) and any targets that the organisation has set: give everyone regular updates in progress towards these targets
- Develop web pages to promote the environmental policy and action plan with background material on sustainability issues and how these link to the work of the organisation
- Include an article on this work in any mailing or newsletter to members inviting engagement

E. Outreach work
Key activities:

- Organise workshop and training sessions for members to discuss issues at a conference or one-off event
- Develop a special interest group for interested members
- Work with members and linked groups to identify good practice within current work that can be promoted and replicated

3.2 Finance: procurement, expenditure and funding

Every financial transaction has some impact, both environmentally and socially, and in many cases simple choices can be made to minimise negative impacts. Good procurement is part of the delivery of policy and mission. Good financial management and economic reporting ensures securing of funds in the future.

Procurement is therefore an issue both in terms of the procurement by the organisation and also the procurement of the organisation. Whilst national and local government are keen to buy services from the voluntary sector, and this has been a high profile issue in recent years, the demands of new frameworks and procurement rules will continue to build the pressure for suppliers to provide a more environmentally sustainable service.

Towards a sustainable procurement strategy

The links between procurement and sustainability may be clear to those working on policy issues but may be less obvious to those staff responsible for procurement (such as office managers). It is often the case that there is little communication between the different sections on such issues. Both need to be involved in developing such a strategy and consultation and research will be important first steps in developing a strategy. Background information box 4 covers this in detail.
‘Sustainable procurement’

The OGC (Office for Government Commerce) refers to ‘Sustainable procurement’ as a basis for all “policy-through-procurement” issues – where procurement is seen as a way to achieve wider policy objectives. These include environmental issues but may also involve issues such as job creation in regeneration areas, opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and ethnic minority businesses (EMBs), fairtrade and links with developing countries, skills development, and disability, race and gender equality.

Work on Sustainable Procurement has largely developed out of the UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy, published in March 2005, which committed the public sector to leading by example in delivering sustainable development objectives. The strategy established a business-led Sustainable Procurement Task Force to bring about a step-change in public sector procurement practice. While the focus has been on the public sector, there is much that the third sector can learn from these experiences.

Many voluntary organisations would support this idea and have been doing so by incorporating work on training and equality in the services they tender to local government and this is adding value to such work. Environmentally responsible or ‘green’ procurement - the selection of products and services that minimise environmental impacts – has been less of an issue in the sector to date but this is changing fast.

You may find it easier to think in terms of a socio-environmental input/output model.

![Diagram showing input/output model]

- **Energy inputs** – fuel for travel, electric etc.
- **Inputs** – materials, where staff come from, procurement etc.
- **Process and activities** – what you do and how you do it. Also the effectiveness and efficiency of how you work.
- **Outputs** – the quality of what you do / produce, the outputs, outcomes and impacts.
- **Waste you produce and what you do with it.**
Some examples of the range of socio-environmental issues to consider are:

- Energy use (and waste) within the organisation’s buildings and by contractors that contributes to the organisations’ ‘carbon footprint’
- Electricity supplies for the organisation and getting this from a company sourcing renewable energy
- Ways to minimise waste from suppliers or within your organisation and reusing materials where possible
- Introduction of recycling programmes throughout the organisation
- Current transport policies and the development of travel plans for the organisation
- Use of chemicals and the possibility of using less polluting alternatives
- Supply sources: using local suppliers means that your money is more likely to circulate within the local economy. There are also global supply issues, notably ‘fairtrade’. Many places are now ‘fairtrade towns’ or cities, and the use of fairly traded tea and coffee is fast becoming standard within the sector. It’s certainly hard to see why any organisation promoting social justice at home would not want to see tea- and coffee-growing communities across the world getting a better deal

Lastly any organisation can address purchasing issues at a very basic level by asking:

- Do we need to buy it?
- Are we buying more than we need?
- Can this product be reused and recycled?

Progressive improvements around these issues are part of any environmental management programme.

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**Background information box 4**

**Towards a sustainable procurement strategy**

Developing a procurement strategy for any organisation that includes social and environmental concerns is a process in itself. The key stages are:

1. **Policy work**
   This work should relate to and be guided by an environment or sustainability policy and should aim to support delivering targets related to that policy.

2. **Engage with staff**
   Consult and engage all those involved in procurement in your organisation. It may be sensible to set up a working group to take this forward.

3. **Review existing purchasing and related procedures**
   A quick review of the products and services in regular use by the organisation is an important first step. This should help identify areas where changes can be made that will have a significant impact.
4. Identify first priority areas and risk assessment
A goods and services review should identify areas where changes can be made easily. These might include basics such as recycled paper and fairtrade tea and coffee. Introducing these can show staff that change is actually happening. Risk assessment may be needed and external advice may be helpful. If you print a lot of materials consult with those supplying printers: they will be happy to advise on recycled papers.

5. Engage with suppliers
Consult suppliers regarding their sustainability and environmental policies and find out whether and how they can offer greener supplies. Most office suppliers offer a range of recycled papers etc. If you cannot get what you want it may be time to review suppliers.

6. Put new practices into operation
Let staff know that new practices are coming in and that these have the support of management. Where change is impacting directly on staff habits, find ways to support the change: a ‘fairtrade coffee morning’ is a good way to introduce this issue.

7. Review
Let the changes settle in and conduct a review through the working group after perhaps three months. Identify and tackle any problems. Be clear on where savings have been made and where any extra expenses have been incurred.

8. Identify other areas for work and go forward
This first set of steps should be the start of a longer-term process of progressive improvements.

3.3 Operations and services
This is the area where most organisations can make changes fairly easily. Simple behaviour change can save 5 – 10% on energy bills in most workplaces and a little investment in energy efficiency can double those savings rapidly.

There are many organisations that can offer support such as Envirowise (Ref. 10), the Energy Savings Trust and the Carbon Trust. Much of this work is focused on SMEs (small and medium enterprises) and the great majority of voluntary organisations fit within this range. Some local councils work with specialists organisations to offer subsidised environmental reviews etc. Every Action Counts has developed a number of guides specifically for third sector organisations (Ref. 11).

They also offer a range of downloadable factsheets that include:

- First Steps to Saving Energy in the Office
- Ideas for Saving Energy in Homes and Offices
- An Introduction to Green Purchasing
- Starting an Office Paper Recycling Scheme

This briefing does not seek to duplicate such work but does offer some initial guidelines.
Greening the workplace – some simple actions

Basic behaviour change
Many of the actions people take at home are also relevant at work, such as switching off equipment, computers and lights when not in use and reducing and recycling waste. Encouraging this behaviour can be done in all sorts of simple ways: notes to all staff and posters to highlight key action points will help. Some organisations appoint ‘green champions’ to encourage and support change in each work section.

Leading change and managing discussion
Leadership is also important here. It is always important for managers to lead by example. In some cases there may be a need to ‘invest to save’ by, for instance, installing energy saving measures such as timers and motion/daylight sensors. Developing a clear and universal double-sided printing policy will need support from all parts of management. Leadership will be important in managing staff discussion and getting agreement on possibly contested issues such as office temperatures. In this case 19-20°C is recommended for an office environment: it is estimated that for every 1°C reduction in temperature, a business can save 10% of its heating bills.

Leading by example
It is important that people can see they are making a difference. This encourages further activity. For example, one aim of making these changes is to save money on gas, electricity, water and waste disposal bills. A recent survey (Ref. 10) suggests that the more transparent any organisation is about the utility costs and their impacts on budgets, the more staff will be encouraged to take the same actions in the workplace as they do at home. The Ethical Property Company, which rents space to many voluntary groups, has a policy of displaying monthly energy usage figures in the foyers of its offices.

Green legal requirements
There is a growing body of legislation around waste and energy and more can be expected. The extent to which any of this will apply to any voluntary organisation will vary depending on what the organisation does. An important part of developing policy and practice will be to get someone within the organisation to do a review of related legal issues.

These simple ‘green office’ changes are a good place to start but the action plan should look to the longer term.

Many people now do what they can at home, but are less sure about how to make a difference at work. One recent survey of more than 1,800 UK office workers (Ref. 10) found that a third took no action whatsoever to reduce the resources they use at work. It is up to any organisation to provide information, support and leadership to overcome this confusion and to get people to act. As with any form of policy and practice development (see green procurement box) engagement of staff is critical and time will need to be set aside to make changes.

Change can come through:

- Education for behaviour change
- Leadership and clear direction
- New programmes and initiatives
Any effective, responsible organisation should consider undertaking a full environmental audit and developing an Environmental Management System (EMS). An EMS provides your organisation with a framework through which its environmental performance can be monitored, improved and controlled. This is not just the domain of the big organisation. How can you know if you are improving if you don’t record it and manage it? An EMS can:

- Define environmental responsibilities for all staff
- Identify opportunities to reduce waste, including raw materials, utility use and waste disposal costs
- Increase profits
- Reduce the risk of fines for non-compliance with environmental legislation
- Ensure all operations have procedures to minimise their environmental impacts
- Record environmental performance against set targets
- Provide a clear audit trail
- Attract shareholders and investors

The Envirowise website (Ref. 10) has further information on EMS. In some areas grants are available for environmental audits of charities and to help them start work on EMS activities.

### Background information box 5

**Cutting your organisation’s ‘carbon footprint’**

So what is a carbon footprint?

It’s a widely used and often misused phrase. The Carbon Trust (a body set up by the UK government to support action by business on climate change) defines a ‘carbon footprint’ as ‘the total set of greenhouse gas emissions caused directly and indirectly by an [individual, event, organisation, product] expressed as CO₂e.’

So what does ‘CO₂e’ mean?

There are six main greenhouse gases which cause climate change and are limited by the Kyoto Protocol. Each gas has a different global warming potential. For simplicity of reporting, the mass of each gas emitted is commonly translated into a carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) amount so that the total impact from all sources can be summed to one figure.

What does this mean for an organisation?

The full footprint of an organisation encompasses a wide range of emissions sources, from direct use of fuels to indirect impacts such as employee travel or emissions from other organisations within the supply chain. There are three main types of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from any organisation:

1. **Direct emissions that result from activities the organisation controls**
   This includes on-site combustion of fuels, running of a vehicle fleet etc.

2. **Emissions from electricity and gas usage**
   This includes heating, lighting and powering of equipment. Although the organisation is not directly in control of the emissions, by using the electricity it is indirectly responsible for the release of CO₂.

3. **Indirect emissions from products and services that the organisation does not directly control**
   A company that manufactures a product is indirectly responsible for the carbon that is emitted in the preparation and transport of the raw materials. The Carbon Trust admits that “producing a full footprint covering all three types of emissions can be quite a complex task”. There are however a range of online tools that can help calculate a carbon footprint and there are many sources of advice.

For many office-based voluntary organisations one key area where savings can be made is likely to be saving energy. See the Every Action Counts (Ref. 11) factsheet on First Steps to Saving Energy in the Office for more advice.
Advocacy and work with stakeholders

All TSOs have a responsibility to those they serve or represent, including members, partners, clients and audiences. This inevitably needs a mix of consultation and engagement, education, informing and advocacy. The CEO with vision will recognise how the sustainability agenda is an important part of this and how environmental issues are now implicitly part of the social and economic agendas and therefore relate to the advocacy work of all organisations.

No one organisation can keep in touch with all (or even most) aspects of policy debate and development.

Environmental issues have an increasing impact on how people live their lives and how communities work. It will therefore make sense for all organisations (especially those with an interest in policy work) to at least track developments in this area. It may also be beneficial to work together on joint responses.

Recent discussions over ‘green taxes’ (more accurately seen as taxes on environmentally damaging behaviour), show the need for this. Some agencies have expressed concern over the possible impacts of these on poorer communities and have not followed the discussions within the green sector on how such changes can indeed be ‘poverty-proofed’. This has led to some controversy that has largely been unfounded, and which could have been avoided if all involved had been in better communication.

A good example is fuel prices which, it is clear, will rise in the longer term. Some of this may be due to the imminent arrival of ‘peak oil’ – the time at which global oil extraction reaches a peak. But it is also the case that many green economists, who recognise the need for the major cuts on CO2 emissions set out earlier, see that raising fuel prices will play a part in reducing demand. Some of this may be done by shifting patterns of taxation and how that is done is likely to have significant social impacts. The wider voluntary sector needs to play a strong role in ensuring that this is done in ways that minimise inequalities.

So far work linking environmental and social goals has tended to focus on improving practice – leadership is again needed to bring social campaigners into environmental debates (and vice versa) in a positive and constructive manner.
Engaging your stakeholders

The impacts of any organisation, be they social, environmental or economic, go way beyond the office. Just as any social impact assessment would involve work with stakeholders, so it makes sense to maximise environmental benefits.

This work should be seen as part of any long-term policy. It might include:

- Consulting those you work with and represent on their understanding of sustainability issues to assess what role you should play
- Engaging members and beneficiaries in debates on what sustainability means for them and how to face the challenges it presents for them
- Publishing and promoting an environmental policy and key points within an action plan
- Offering information on environmental issues such as food, energy and transport to service users
- Reviewing ways in which the organisation works with others: this can range from providing the best possible advice for those using public transport to get to the office to the use of plastic bags and other giveaways at events

Organisations working with a focus on a particular area can also play an important role in supporting and advocating work to improve that area. This could include building links with relevant environmental and amenity organisations and helping them develop work in the area. Many voluntary organisations may also find it easier than local people to engage effectively with local councils.
There is no real doubt that moves towards sustainability are going to have an increasing impact on people and communities in the UK. The coming years are likely to see major social, economic and environmental changes. Environmental impacts will range from increased utility bills and charges for waste disposal to heatwaves and increased flooding. As ever, some communities will be better insulated from these impacts than others.

Any organisation working for better wellbeing and quality of life now and in the future will not be doing its job if it does not consider these impacts. One of the best ways to show that an organisation does take these issues seriously is to take action to reduce its own impacts and to lead by example.

Change is needed at policy level both in terms of overall sustainability policy and in considering environmental issues related to other policy work. Change is also needed in the delivery of services and the development of projects and infrastructure in order to reduce impacts and promote innovation. Above and beyond that the third sector has a critical role to play in showing that these concerns are not simply ‘green issues’ but are a common social responsibility for all sectors of society. The voluntary sector has consistently led the agenda for social change; now it needs to take that same progressive approach to transforming our environment.

In all these aspects the role of a CEO is critical. A successful voluntary organisation is one that goes beyond simply reacting to issues with which they have had little engagement and instead plays a proactive role in delivering positive change. The sustainability challenge is to deliver that change across the full range of social, environmental and economic issues, and to make that change last into the future.

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10. Envirowise has a range of useful materials www.envirowise.gov.uk/uk/
11. Every Action Counts materials are free to download at www.everyactioncounts.org.uk
Appendix: Environment, sustainable development and sustainability.

All these words can be defined in various ways. The ‘environment’ has to some extent been defined by environmental organisations and many people may think of the environment in terms of global issues and threatened species rather than what’s outside their front door. At its simplest our environment is where we live, but it’s also critically linked with the ecosystems within that environment that keep it habitable.

Sustainable Development (SD) came into use in the 1990s and there are many definitions. The ‘original’ one is from the ‘Brundtland Report’ from the UN World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 (Ref. 8). That report sought to resolve emerging tensions between the need for global social and economic development and protecting the environment. It set out sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This has variously been summarised as ‘not cheating on our grandchildren’.

The UN Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 put this on the political agenda. It set out the idea in the ‘Agenda 21’ report (Ref. 9) that SD should be about integrating environmental, social and economic issues. Agenda 21 was signed up to by 197 nations and includes chapters on health, poverty and human settlements alongside issues such as forests and oceans. It also sets out roles for what it defines as the nine ‘major groups’ within civil society (women, young people, indigenous people, NGOs, trade unions, local authorities, business, the scientific community and farmers). Agenda 21 led to a lot of activity around ‘Local Agenda 21’ programmes but most targets have not been fully delivered.

Sustainable development is now a key strand in national policy. The current UK sustainable development strategy, called ‘Securing Our Future’, was launched in 2005 (http://www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/publications/uk-strategy/index.htm). It sets out five principles:

- Living within environmental limits
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- Achieving a sustainable economy
- Promoting good governance
- Using sound science responsibly

‘Sustainability’ is a less clear term. It is often simply applied to projects and initiatives that can last into the future. It has come to be used as a useful shorthand for practices that link social, environmental and quality of life issues and is used in this way in this briefing. In this context phrases such as ‘environmental sustainability’ or ‘economic sustainability’ can be seen as limited versions of this integrated approach.
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